

AMY MALBEUF

**tensions**

FEBRUARY 28, 2018 – APRIL 20, 2019

**EXHIBITION:** FEBRUARY 28 – APRIL 20, 2019

**OPENING RECEPTION:** FEBRUARY 28, 7:30PM

Organized by the Illingworth Kerr Gallery  
at the Alberta College of Art and Design

COVER: Amy Malbeuf, *across the land*, 2018. Buffalo hide, wood, snow fence, 114" x 109". Photo by Jordan Bennett.

ISBN: 978-1-927076-30-9

# BUILDING OUR BEAUTIFUL WEBS: THE WORK OF AMY MALBEUF IN *tensions*

Text by Quill Christie-Peters

*Sometimes, my body vibrates. Under a still night sky, my hair reaches into the galaxies above, each strand travelling to a different place I have known and loved. My feet touch mossy floor and visit bones in the earth whose stories are in mine. My body vibrates and cannot be contained in flesh or moment. Sometimes, I rupture open and spill out onto the earth beside me. Parts of me drip into river, others live forever in stone, my hair always reaching upwards, sometimes leaving me to return to our home in the sky. Anishinaabekwe vibrating under the moonlight in complicated motion. Anishinaabekwe they can never contain.*

*Sometimes, in the stillness of my home, I sit for hours and focus all of my vibrating energy into an act of holding something still, of pulling thread taught, of maintaining a perfect tension to create, to honor, to remember, to love. Many Anishinaabeg hands before me have been carriers of this beautiful tension, fixing beads in place, stretching skin, building the webs that keep our communities whole. But we have always known that if you look real close, you can still see those beings vibrating, singing under the moonlight, alive and in complicated motion. We understand that nothing can ever be contained.*

Just as Anishinaabeg maintain our beautiful communities through loving acts of tension, Amy Malbeuf gestures us towards new worlds through hers. The beadwork, the tufting, the ceremony, the stretching, are all acts of tension rooted in a radical slowness of labour and emanating from vibrating bodies within the web of creation. Kwe, you are so generous to share these acts with us, you are so generous to build this web. As I engage with Amy's work, I am called to think about my own relationships to family, to acts of tension, to the tension my body experiences, to labour, to slowness, and to love. I think about the expansive stillness of the night sky and how that feeling is replicated within a long night of beading. I think about how the slowness of our art requires conversation and community, laughter and remembrance, the webs that hold us together. Kwe, what did you think about during those long hours of holding tension? Who sat beside you? What ancestors did you make smile? What did you dream for us?



TOP to BOTTOM: Amy Malbeuf, *Arctic Grayling*, 2018. Caribou hair sculpturing and polyurethane tarp on velvet, 15" x 15".

Amy Malbeuf, *Woodland Caribou*, 2018. Caribou hair sculpturing and polyurethane tarp on velvet, 15" x 15".

Amy Malbeuf, *Whooping Crane*, 2018. Caribou hair sculpturing and polyurethane tarp on velvet, 15" x 15".

These beautiful acts of tension that allow us to build worlds from care and love exist within a larger matrix of tension rooted in force and violence. Settler colonialism is the matrix that surrounds this exhibition, that surrounds my body, our communities, our nations, our webs. This kind of tension attempts to hold things in place, attempts to quiet our vibrating bodies into hierarchy and white walls, harsh lines and boxes. Sometimes, my body feels fixed in space and time, pressed thin within the structures of white supremacy, cis-heteropatriarchy, capitalism, ageism, and ableism. Sometimes, my body feels fixed within a painful tension, my skin pulled across bone so much that it breaks open, my blood all over this concrete floor. And all the while, ever so skillfully, settler colonialism hides its tracks and renders itself invisible in many ways. Through normalization and internalization of these rigid structures, sometimes we don't notice that our bodies are vibrating less than they do under that still night sky.

When artists illuminate truth and bring light to these invisibilized structures of power in ways that honour complexity, beauty, pain, and contradiction, they are building new worlds for us. They are asking us to look critically at ourselves and our relationships in ways that are often foreclosed by these structures themselves. As an Anishinaabekwe grappling with the many tensions I uphold, exist within, resist and

maintain, Amy's work allows me to pause within the chaos to see things clearly. In her work, I find solace in the presencing of the beautiful webs of tension that keep our communities together while also acknowledging the tensions that attempt to pull us apart. In her work, I am reminded of the power I hold as an Anishinaabekwe while also acknowledging my complicity within the larger structures I seek to dismantle. As Indigenous people, we are so rarely given the space that our complexity necessitates, and here, Amy has gone and created that space for us and that is a gift.

As I write this, RCMP and government officials are illegally occupying unceded Wet'suwet'en territory through force and violence on behalf of capitalism, the heart of the settler state. Within these moments of overt state violence when Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island plan and strategize, sob and laugh, like many, I am overcome with complicated tension. The tension of wanting to drop everything and put my body on the frontlines but feeling frozen because of frivolous entrapments like jobs and rent and money. The tension of knowing these entrapments are so far removed from meaning and have nothing to do with our fullness, our wholeness, our beautiful webs and not knowing how to escape them. The tension of animal kin so carefully tufted beside the polyurethane routes of colonialism that harm them. The tension of placing Indigenous



ABOVE (L-R): Amy Malbeuf, *The Outer Seam 2*, 2016. Embroidery hoop and tarp, 2.5' x 12'.

Amy Malbeuf, *The Outer Seam 3*, 2018. Embroidery hoop and tarp, 2.5' x 12'.

Amy Malbeuf, *The Outer Seam 4*, 2018. Embroidery hoop and tarp, 1' x 12'.



ABOVE: Amy Malbeuf, *heart*, 2018. Ochre and bear grease on canvas tarp, 30' x 15.5'.



women's labour and love within the confines of art institutions that can never understand them.

The tension of being an Indigenous person whose feet touch bone and whose hair reaches the stars and yet, participates in capitalism.

We exist in complicated contradiction and colonial chaos, often grappling with our own experiences of firsthand violence while also trying to extend ourselves within our communities and beyond to resist the settler state. In these moments of complicated tension, I can feel a great hopelessness and sorrow. Unlike the beautiful tensions my hands create that leave space for our vibrations, settler colonial tensions fix us in rigidity and deviations are punished with violence. In these moments of complicated tension, we come to witness just how rigid the confines of state violence

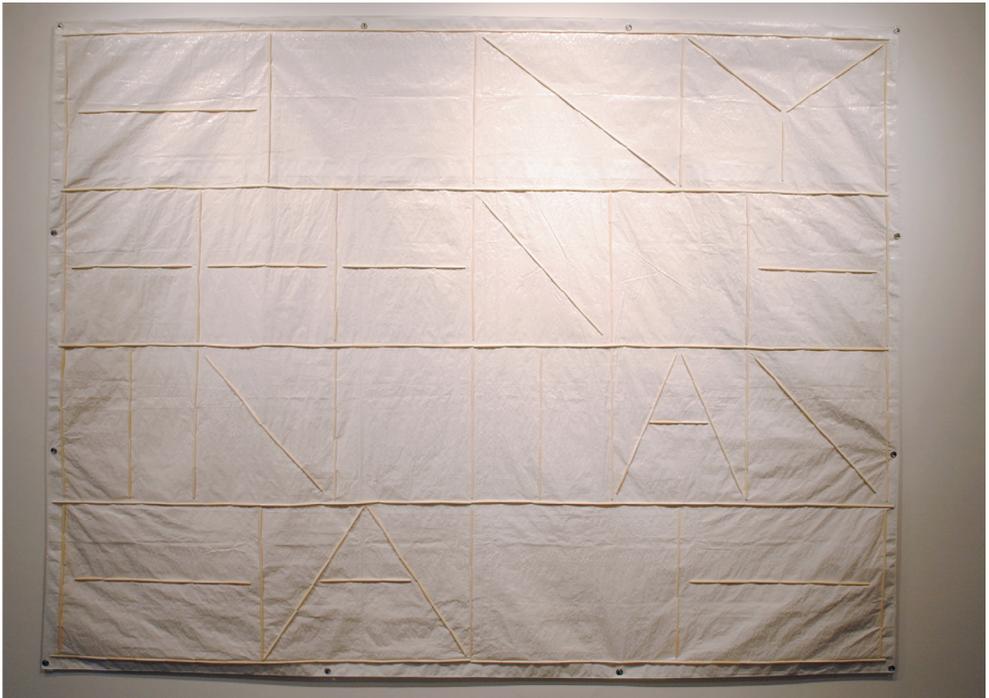


ABOVE: Amy Malbeuf, *Stretch*, 2017. Rabbit fur, push pins, and inherited objects (coyote fur stretchers), variable dimensions, 6' x 3'.

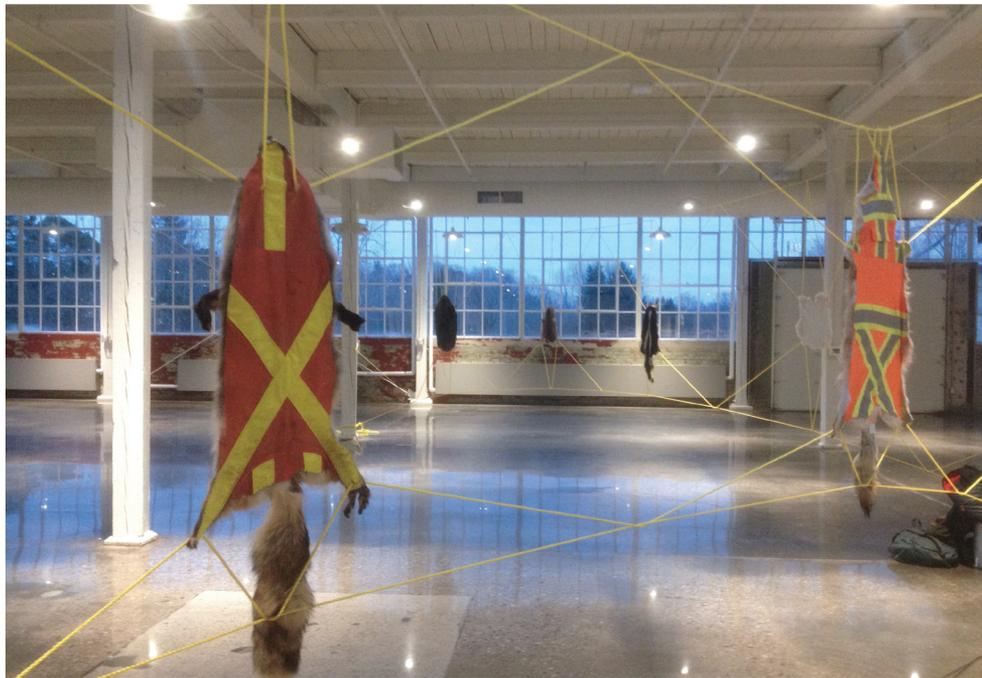
are. This violence punishes those who block capitalist production, targets those who create meaningful alternatives to these structures, and demonstrates just how much control this violence has over how we spend our time, how we participate in labor and how we relate to ourselves and each other. I can feel a great hopelessness and sorrow. But then, Amy's work. Those vibrating beads and breathing hides. That bear grease that is singing to us.

The first thing I felt when I engaged with this exhibition was the tension between Amy's work as a practice rooted in kinship and love, and the institution as a colonial entity rooted in Indigenous dispossession. Like an Anishinaabekwe feeling stuck within settler colonial structures, my first thought is how these living pieces seem stuck within these institutional spaces. Can they breathe within these walls? Can I breathe within these walls? It is important that I ask myself these questions. It is important to see things clearly. Foregrounding these tensions and inciting these questions is making space for our complexities in ways that gesture us towards beautiful, challenging, messy, and unsettling realizations related to the self and one's relationship to the world. This is where we must start. This is how we build new worlds. I look a little closer at these works and I notice how these beads are vibrating ever so slightly, forever in complicated motion. I notice

how these works are not so easily bounded by the institution, how they spill over these walls to live in Amy's fingertips and heart; in the conversations and laughter she had; in the moments of stillness spent holding beautiful tension; in the radical slowness of this work. I notice that I am still vibrating, always vibrating. Our work demands that we build strong webs that cannot be contained. Sometimes, we lose sight of what has been built around us or what we are building ourselves, but those around us will always call us back and will shine a light so that we can see. What will we dream for our communities, kwe? Where will our webs take us?



ABOVE: Amy Malbeuf, *BFIF*, 2017. Bone beads on tarp, 84" x 110".



*Sometimes, my body vibrates. My hair reaches into the stars, my feet into bones. My body, shifting and changing, can never be fixed, can never be contained. And I sit in my quiet house and build my web, as my grandma does, as my aunts do, as Amy does. Slow work, body work, vibrating work that carries us into the future, even when we feel stuck, even when we feel fixed, we always have those vibrations, those webs, that will one day, tear it all down and let us dance wildly under the moonlight.*

ABOVE: Amy Malbeuf, coyote, rabbit, fox, muskrat, skunk, beaver, 2014. Furs, safety vests, rope, wood, variable dimensions.

## LIST OF WORKS:

*coyote, rabbit, fox, muskrat, skunk, beaver*, 2014. Furs, safety vests, rope, wood, dimensions variable.

*heart*, 2018. Ochre and bear grease on canvas tarp, 30' x 15.5'.

*Stretch*, 2017, Rabbit fur, push pins, and inherited objects (coyote fur stretchers), variable dimensions, 6' x 3'.

*Arctic Grayling*, 2018. Caribou hair sculpturing and polyurethane tarp on velvet, 15" x 15".

*Woodland Caribou*, 2018. Caribou hair sculpturing and polyurethane tarp on velvet, 15" x 15".

*Whooping Crane*, 2018. Caribou hair sculpturing and polyurethane tarp on velvet, 15" x 15".

*across the land*, buffalo hide, wood, snow fence. 114" x 109"

*Prairie Wolves*, 2017, beadwork on tarp, 5' 6" x 5'

*Tarp 2017*, 2017, beadwork on tarp, 6' x 8'

*BFIF*, 2017, bone beads on tarp, 84" x 110"

*Woodland Camo*, 2017, tarp, beadwork, inherited objects (gun case) 90" x 110"

*The Outer Seam 2*, 2016, embroidery hoop and tarp, 2.5' x 12'

*The Outer Seam 3*, 2018, embroidery hoop and tarp, dimensions: 2.5' x 12'

*The Outer Seam 4*, 2018, embroidery hoop and tarp, estimated dimensions: 1' x 12'

## AUTHOR'S BIO

Quill Christie-Peters is an Anishinaabe arts programmer and self-taught visual artist currently residing in Northwestern Ontario. She currently works as the Director of Education and Training for the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective where she is coordinating the Emerging Curatorial Training Program. She is the creator of the Indigenous Youth Residency Program, an artist residency for Indigenous youth that engages land-based creative practices through Anishinaabe artistic methodologies. She holds a Master's degree in Indigenous Governance on Anishinaabe art-making as a process of falling in love and sits on the Board of Directors for Native Women in the Arts. Her written work can be found in *GUTS Magazine* and *Tea N' Bannock* and her visual work can be found at @raunchykw.

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KERRI-LYNN REEVES

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LISA WOOD

### **OPENINGS**

MAY 16 - JULY 5, 2019

The AGSM is supported by the Canada Council for the Arts, the Manitoba Arts Council, and the City of Brandon.



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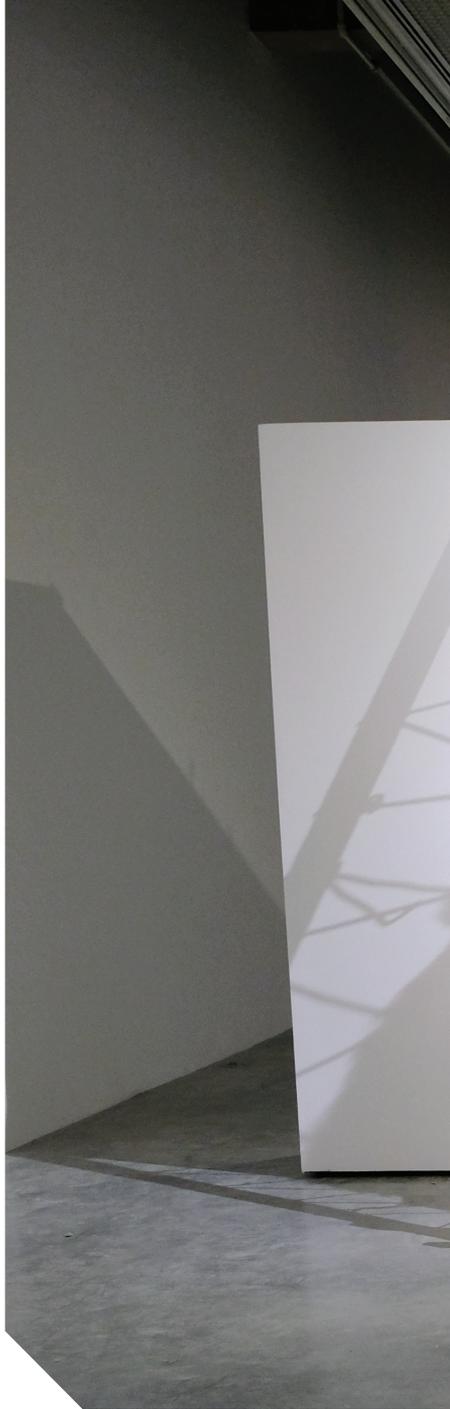
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